

# Women & Alcohol: Effects of Drinking Over a Lifespan

## Why are lower levels of drinking recommended for women than for men?

- Women are at greater risk for developing alcohol-related problems
- Alcohol passes through the digestive tract and is dispersed in the water in the body. The more water available, the more diluted the alcohol. Men have more water in their bodies.
- A woman's organs are exposed to more alcohol and its toxic byproducts when the body breaks down and eliminates alcohol

## Risks of Drinking

- Becoming an alcoholic  
Drinking more than 7 drinks per week increases a woman's chances of abusing or becoming dependent on alcohol.
- Drinking & Driving
- Medication interaction
- Memory loss, brain function, and Alzheimer's Disease
- Bone Disease  
Heavy alcohol use has been shown to compromise bone health and increase the risk of osteoporosis by decreasing bone density and weakening the bone's mechanical properties.
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- Cancer
- Heart Disease
- Alcoholic Liver Disease  
Women are more likely than men to develop liver inflammation and to die from cirrhosis.
- Breast Cancer  
Research suggests that as little as one drink per day can raise the risk of breast cancer, in some women.

## Alcohol & Adolescence

- Drinking under age 21 is illegal
- Drunk driving is one of the leading causes of teen death
- Research shows that about 39% of 9th grade girls (age 14) report drinking in the past month.  
About 21% of these girls reported having 5 or more drinks on a single occasion in the previous month

## Alcohol & Young Adults

- Drinking makes young women more vulnerable to sexual assault and unsafe and unplanned sex.
- Young people who begin drinking before age 15 have a 40% higher risk of developing alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some time in their lives, than those who wait until age 21 to begin drinking.

## Age & Alcohol

- Aging reduces the body's ability to adapt to alcohol
- Alcohol problems among older people are often mistaken for other age-related conditions, resulting in the problems being missed and untreated.
- Older adults reach higher blood levels of alcohol even when drinking the same amount as younger people  
This is because with aging the amount of water in the body is reduced and alcohol becomes more concentrated.

## Older Women & Alcohol

- As they grow older, fewer women drink
- Elderly patients are admitted to hospitals about as often for alcohol-related causes as heart attacks
- Older women may be more sensitive to the stigma of being an alcoholic and therefore hesitate to admit they have a drinking problem
- Older women, more than any other group, use medications that may interact with alcohol in a harmful way.

## Women who tend to drink more

- Those having trouble in their closest relationship
- Never Married
- Divorced or separated
- Heavy-drinking husband or partner
- History of childhood sexual abuse
- Depression
- Family history of alcohol problems
- Issues coping with stress